

Maine West

Digital Inclusion & Regional Workforce Plan

At Axiom, we believe rural broadband deployment is about much more than a fast connection — it is about people’s livelihoods, education, and well-being.

Access to high speed internet connections is one piece of the digital puzzle. Equally important for the Maine West area is building the capacity of local people and institutions to use digital technology to achieve their goals. This is where Digital Inclusion comes into the picture.

Digital Inclusion refers to the activities needed to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies. This includes: 1) affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2) affordable internet-enabled equipment that meet the needs of the user; 3) access to digital literacy training.

Broadband access and adoption has been identified by stakeholders across the Maine West region as a critical complement to the regional Technology Plan, and a vital strategy for improving overall quality of life in rural communities. Specifically, Digital Inclusion programming is important to:

- Ensuring equitable access to municipal services that are increasingly provided via the internet;
- Improving the ability of adult learners to take advantage of educational services;
- Expanding utilization of telehealth services;
- Enhancing the productivity of businesses and their employees.

As part of the Maine West Broadband Planning Initiative, Axiom Technologies developed a Digital Inclusion Plan to identify specific strategies and actions to improve Digital Literacy and Inclusion in the Maine West area.

The recommendations outlined in Axiom’s Digital Inclusion report are grounded in baseline information gathered by: 1) Inventorying the low-cost broadband plans offered by current broadband providers serving the region; 2) Inventorying computers/laptops that are available to the public at no or a low cost; 3) Surveying Maine West residents and businesses regarding their computer skills/digital literacy training and workforce skills training.

From these inventory and survey results, Axiom developed detailed recommendations and opportunities for the Maine West area that are described in full in the following Digital Inclusion Report. This section of the report is structured to address Axiom’s digital inclusion recommendations:

- ✓ Promote and Support Affordable Internet & Computer Access Programs
- ✓ Provide Digital Literacy Training

These recommendations are an investment in the citizens within the communities of Maine West, and enhance the larger regional connectivity effort contained in this report.

Benefits include:

- **Higher Take-rates**, as people understand the value of an internet connection to their lives, they are more likely to take service
- **Reducing barriers** to adoption and helping community members access learning tools for an increased on-line presence
- People with service **upgrading their service**, again increasing the viability of a project being successful
- **Businesses understanding how to leverage on-line tools and cloud services** to add value and productivity to their operation
- Community members being able to **access life enhancing content, including e commerce, telemedicine services and educational opportunities**
- **Bridging the Digital Divide** by helping teach disadvantaged members of the community to participate in what is increasingly an on-line world

By removing barriers and exposing people and businesses to educational opportunities that improves their understanding of on-line benefits Axiom believes we can change the economic status of a region

Digital Inclusion Plan

Digital inclusion is a national priority in the United States, and increasingly a priority in Maine. High-speed internet access is widely recognized as a necessity for full participation in today’s society. Employers, educators, businesses, healthcare providers, and civic institutions expect people to have access to computers and broadband connectivity. However, accessible, reliable, and affordable broadband service continues to be out of reach for millions of Americans and thousands of Mainers, many of whom live in low-income, rural households. This gap in adoption of high-speed Internet and the lack of skills needed to use broadband-enabled tools in meaningful ways continue to be significant problems that policymakers, researchers, and practitioners need to focus on in the United States and in Maine.

I. Promote and Support Affordable Internet & Computer Access Programs:

1. Organize a Public Awareness Campaign to expand utilization of low-cost internet and computer services:
 - a. Promote the availability of low-cost internet service plans available from Consolidated Communications, and Spectrum and other ISPs

Cost continues to be a major barrier to broadband adoption. The following providers in the Maine West region offer low-cost broadband options that address “ability to pay”.

- **Consolidated Communications (FairPoint Communications):**
 - Eligible low-income Consolidated Communication residential customers can qualify for a discount on qualified internet service at their primary residence under the Lifeline Program. The discount consists of federal monthly support of \$9.25.
 - Eligible Consolidated residential customers residing on tribal lands may qualify for an additional federal discount of up to \$25 per month and installation assistance.
 - Further information, including applications forms, can be found at: www.fairpoint.com/home/residential/phone/lifeline.html
 - **Charter Communications (formerly Time Warner Cable):**
 - Charter offers “Spectrum Internet Assist”, which is a low-cost broadband offering. www.SpectrumInternetAssist.com.
 - Plan includes:
 - \$14.99 for 30/4 Mbps with no data caps
 - Internet Modem Included
 - No Contracts Required
 - Add in-home WiFi for \$5.00 more per month
 - Customers must not have been a Charter Communications subscriber within 60 days of signing up for Spectrum Internet Assist.
 - Eligibility requires participation in one of the following:
 - National School Lunch Program (NSLP); free or reduced cost lunch
 - Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of NSLP
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (>age 65 only)
 - Residents may visit Charter Communication’s website or call 844-525-1574 to determine eligibility
- b. **Promote PC’s for Maine and other programs offering low cost computers to Maine West’s residents**

Low-cost or free computers are often just as important as having access to low-cost or free Internet options, particularly for people in low-income communities.

- **PC’s for Maine** www.pcsformaine.org offers refurbished, used computers that are donated by businesses in Maine and are available to low-income families.
- **PC’s for Maine** will consider installing a kiosk at a local business to sell low-cost computers locally. Axiom will work with local businesses in each community and facilitate a conversation with PC’s for Maine, should the community or Maine West decide to move forward.
- **Goodwill’s “Good Tech”** program offers refurbished, used computers to low-income residents. <https://goodwillnne.org/stores/goodtech>

- **Lending Library of Devices**, laptops, desktops, iPads, etc., could be provided for residents to borrow on an “as-needed” basis. The devices might be donated or grant funds could be applied for to purchase equipment.
- c. **Promote and support the region’s libraries as Public Computer Access locations**

Increasing public access computing allows residents to access technology in places they feel comfortable and supported is critical. If a business or resident cannot afford equipment or an internet subscription, and if broadband is not available at their location, Public Computer Access is essential.

- Below is a list of Public Computer Access in libraries in the Maine West region; all libraries offer free WiFi:
 - **West Paris Public Library**, <https://www.westparislibrary.org>
 - 6 computers
 - **Ludden Memorial Library**, Dixfield <https://dixfield.org/library.html>
 - 8 computers
 - **Andover Public Library**, Andover, <http://www.andover.lib.me.us/>
 - 4 computers
 - **Bethel Public Library**, Bethel <http://www.bethellibraryassociation.org>
 - 3 computers
 - **Whitman Public Library**, Woodstock <http://whitmanpubliclibrary.org>
 - 2 computers
 - **Rumford Public Library**, Rumford <http://www.rumford.lib.me.us>
 - 12 computers
 - **Mexico Public Library**, Mexico <http://www.mexico.lib.me.us>
 - 5 computers
 - **Paris Public Library**, Paris <http://www.paris.lib.me.us>
 - 6 computers
 - ***University of Maine at Augusta Center, South Paris** <https://learn.maine.edu/southparis>
 - 7 computers
 - ***University of Maine at Augusta Center, Rumford** <https://learn.maine.edu/rumford/>
 - 10 computers
 - **Norway Public Library**, Norway <http://www.norway.lib.me.us>
 - 5 computers
 - **Zadoc Long Free Library**, Buckfield <http://zadoc0.wixsite.com/zadoc>
 - 2 computers
 - **Oxford Public Library**, Oxford <http://www.freeland-holmes.lib.me.us>
 - 3 computers
 - **Waterford Library**, Waterford <http://www.waterford.lib.me.us>
 - 2 computers

*The computers in the University Centers are not open access for the public.

2. **Establish Community Technology Funds to subsidize cost of broadband for low-income families, or other technology needs**

Seattle’s Technology Matching Fund and Digital Equity initiative is an example of a local funding resource that is designed to increase access to free or low-cost broadband, empower

residents with digital literacy skills, and ensure affordable, available and sufficient devices for historically underserved or underrepresented communities. Applicants are nonprofit organizations representing minorities, immigrants, seniors, youth or people with disabilities. City dollars are matched by the community's contribution of volunteer labor, materials, professional services, or cash. Since 1997, when the Fund was created, more than \$4.2 million has supported 300 community technology projects.

II. Digital Literacy Training:

Even with access to computers and the internet, many people lack the skills needed to use available tools and services – making Digital Literacy Training a critical element of Digital Inclusion efforts.

While many people take computers and the internet for granted, many others still lack the basic skills needed to use the equipment and related software and internet services. This skills gap is a challenge for individuals seeking educational, employment, health and other public services, and for employers seeking qualified workers.

Lead strategies and recommendations for addressing Digital Literacy needs include:

1. **Work with Maine West area Adult Education programs to create and promote collaborative digital literacy programming and potential circuit-rider service to deliver affordable educational services across the region.**

- **Region 9 Adult & Community Education (River Valley)**, located in Mexico serves Mexico, Rumford, Dixfield, Canton, Catharge, Peru, Hanover, and Roxbury. Classes are held at the Mexico location. Digital Literacy classes offered include Introduction to Computer, Google Docs, Microsoft Word and Excel, Kindle, Digital Photography, Android Phone, and a computer literacy class.

Region 9 Adult & Community Education is interested in offering more classes, if funding was available, but will need to recruit instructors. Computers are available at the Mexico location for student use.

A listing of available Business & Skills Training programs (including digital literacy classes) is available online at <https://region9.coursestorm.com/category/computers-and-technology>.

- **RSU/MSAD #44 Adult & Community Education** is located in Bethel and serves the residents of Bethel, Newry, Andover, Gilead, and Woodstock, as well as the Unorganized Territories (Albany, Riley, Mason). The Senior College occasionally offers digital literacy classes, and if anyone needs computer help, students are encouraged to drop into the learning center in Bethel. They also occasionally have high-school student volunteers that do technology tutoring.

RSU/MSAD #44 Adult & Community Education is interested in offering more classes, if funding is available, but will need to recruit instructors. It would also be helpful if they could purchase laptops for student use.

A listing of available Business & Skills Training programs (including digital literacy classes) is online at <https://sad44.coursestorm.com/category/business-skills-training>.

- **Oxford Hills/Nezinscot Adult Education** is located in Oxford Hills and serves South Paris, Norway, Harrison, Waterford, Oxford, West Paris, Hebron and Otisfield. Classes are held at Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School, South Paris and Buckfield Junior/Senior High School in Buckfield. There is a computer lab with 10 computers located at Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School that is available for students. Digital literacy classes include all Microsoft programs and basic computer literacy on an as-needed basis for adult education students.

Oxford Hills/Nezinscot Adult Education is interested in offering more classes, if funding is available, but will need to recruit instructors. It would also be helpful if they could purchase laptops for student use.

A listing of available Business & Skills Training programs (including digital literacy classes) is available online at <https://sad17.coursestorm.com/category/computers-and-technology>.

Other digital literacy program resources include:

- **University of Maine at Augusta Centers*** located in South Paris and Rumford offer computer skills course onsite and a CIS 100 Introduction to Computer Applications course. The centers also have other advanced computer courses that are offered online/ITV for those that are pursuing degrees.

A listing of available classes (including digital literacy classes) is available online at <https://learn.maine.edu/Rumford> and <https://learn.maine.edu/southparis>.

- **Maine Department of Labor's CareerCenter** is committed to assist with workforce development skill efforts, www.mainecareercenter.gov.
- **Axiom Education & Training Center's National Digital Equity Center** offers Digital Literacy classes for residents and businesses, and would be pleased to organize a Digital Literacy Program. The program will collaborate with Adult & Community Education programs, the region's CareerCenter, and local community programs.
- In rural communities, time, distance, travel is a barrier to educational attainment; holding classes that are in accessible locations that are familiar and not intimidating will increase participation. Geographic coverage throughout the designated service area ensures strong, widespread participation and good, measurable impacts.
- Augment the work of the Adult Education Programs with an instructor who functions as a circuit rider in offering computer classes at public libraries in the Maine West region, especially those that are in communities that are not near an Adult Education center. (Axiom is applying for funding for a statewide digital inclusion program that would hire up to three AmeriCorp volunteers for each county in Maine to be digital literacy instructors assigned to deliver classes in public libraries.)
- Axiom recommends offering residents of each community digital literacy courses over a 12-month period of time, one class per week in four towns, rotating the locations to multiple locations/towns in the Maine West region. This would ensure that the program has predictability over some period for full residential and business participation.

Recommended Classes include:

- Introduction to Computer
- Windows 8, 10
- Internet Safety
- Microsoft Word
- Microsoft Excel
- Microsoft Outlook
- Microsoft Publisher
- Microsoft PowerPoint
- QuickBooks
- PhotoShop
- Social Media including FaceBook for Business & Individuals, Twitter, etc.
- WordPress
- Video Streaming
- Gmail
- Google Docs, etc.
- Targeted classes:
 - Aging in Place
 - Tourism
 - Business and/or Community Center
 - Business Growth and Support
 - Websites, Social Media and Domain Email
 - Cutting the Cord

Digital Literacy Budget

Digital Literacy is the greatest opportunity to investing in the region’s future. As more citizens’ livelihoods, ability to obtain new skills, understanding of an emerging digital economy are tied to a broadband connection, regions with the forethought to face this new reality will outpace other regions in productivity, increased economic activity and sustained family attraction and wealth.

Axiom is committed to working with Maine West, its regional, state and federal partners to deliver a world-class regional Digital Literacy program, customized to the region’s businesses and citizens.

Teacher/Instructor (Fringe & Salary)	\$ 80,000
Travel	\$ 8,000
Survey Monkey (includes Annual Fee)	\$ 816
Supplies	\$ 4,000
Academic Services Group (curriculum)	\$ 3,184
Administration	\$ 24,000
Total Budget	\$120,000

❖ Budget based on 1-year, 1 class per week in each of four towns, 10 students per class

Axiom will work with the communities and Maine West to pursue funding for digital literacy classes for residents and businesses.

2. **Work with local high schools and their community service programs to deliver free public “drop-in” assistance programs to provide hands-on service to people with computer questions.**
 - As mentioned above, through SAD44 Adult Education Program, which is located at Telstar High School, students have provided local residents with technical assistance in using their devices in exchange for earning community service credit.
 - Another example of this program is Tech Spot, a technology help center in downtown Skowhegan, where local students and volunteers provide the assistance on how to use computers, other devices and software programs. The main goal of Tech Spot is allowing students to become the teachers in an multigenerational environment by giving them the opportunity to share their knowledge of technology with the community.
3. **Launch a new Employers Initiative Program to identify the digital skills needed by local businesses and build the capacity of current and potential employees to meet those needs and support business growth and development.**

An Employers’ Initiative Program is designed and can be implemented to strengthen businesses through enhancing the skills and knowledge of the workforce. It is centered on employer engagement and provisioning of business support services.

The program has four primary components:

- ✓ Employer outreach & recruitment
- ✓ Business assessment
- ✓ Education and training programming
- ✓ Evaluation & assessment

Through these program components, an Employers’ Initiative Program will:

Support local employer business development by focusing and enhancing education and skills training:

- Provide business development needs assessments focused on technology and learning needs
- Based on individual and organizational assessments, provide training that meets employer preferences and business development needs while considering individual employee aspirations and strengths
- Leverage local partnerships and educational resources, regional business development and learning services

Decrease the barriers for continued and advanced educational attainment for adult learners:

- Increase awareness of educational resources and opportunities
- Create pathways to access educational resources
- Bring the educators and trainers to the place of employment

Enhance relevance of local educational training programs and support services to better meet the needs of employers:

- Engage employers to support, inform, and utilize local career pathways programming
- Create opportunities through customized resources and training that are a “win-win” for both the employer and employee

Program Components:

Employer Outreach

- **Goals:** Increase employer engagement in businesses and educational support services
- **Objectives:** Enroll 10 businesses into the Employers’ Initiative Program
- **Outcomes:** Employers support and encourage employee education and advancing their workforce

Business Needs Assessment

- **Goals:** Strengthen the relationship between employers and educational providers
- **Objectives:** Determine what the employers’ needs are, evaluate their current employees, and match training and educational programming that addresses both employer needs and individual employee aspirations
- **Outcomes:** Business develops short-term and long-term technology plan and education plan

Education and Training Program

- **Goals:** Increase skill levels of incumbent workers strengthening the ability of businesses to adapt to industry changes, expand operations, and ultimately increase the value of their business
- **Objectives:** Provide customized training solutions based on employer needs and employee skills levels
- **Outcomes:** Create a more skilled workforce enabling employers to grow and sustain their business

Evaluation & Assessment

A **Maine West Employer Initiative Program** should include a robust **Evaluation & Assessment** component throughout the program to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the employer and the employee and can be adjusted as needed.

- **Goals:**
 - For Adult Learners:**
 - Transferable skills that can be applied to other employment opportunities
 - Potential higher wages for skilled workforce
 - Increased skill levels and productivity in current employment position
 - For Employers:**
 - Enhanced ability to communicate current and future employment needs to educational and community partners
 - Better trained workforce for employers
 - Less turnover and more opportunity to receive a position with more responsibility
 - More opportunity to attract quality employees

For Educational Institutions (K-12, higher education, and training providers):

- Inform programming by providing real-time data on current job opportunities, growth industries, and the skills sought by employers
- **Objectives:**
 - Establish regular reporting system focused on increasing awareness of job opportunities and skills training among target audiences
 - Translate data into meaningful action steps that meet the unique needs of employers, employees, and educational partners
 - Provide information on specific skills needed regionally and affecting the local economy
 - Connect real-time job opportunities data to prior learning assessment (PLA) paths - PLA is a key component to degree completion and has benefits to the individual and employer. A PLA decreases the time it takes to receive a degree, validating past learning, and further emphasizing the connections between industry needs, adult learners' life experiences, and degree completion
- **Outcomes:**

Assess newly acquired technical skills

 - Design and create an unbiased methodology of gathering and measuring newly acquired skills
 - Measure the skills that have been learned through an assessment that will provide effective instruction to students

Instruction Effectiveness

- Review effectiveness of instructional methodologies for students throughout the project. This assessment will be ongoing from the onset of the project
- Address changes made if certain instructional applications are demonstrated to challenge students as well as instructional methods that show signs of significant success

Impacts to Business: Financial and Operational

- Conduct a complete survey of the business and employees' post-instruction to best assess near-term impact of the acquisition of new skills - increased effectiveness and efficiencies in performance of individual and companywide tasks
- Measure the potential and actual impact on a company's revenues - measuring company's use of technology to enhance sales, reach new markets, and better penetrate existing markets
- Increase efficiencies to internal operations as a result of newly acquired tech skills - sales, inventory controls, supply chain relationships, and increase abilities regarding financial controls
- Measure effectiveness of decisions involving capital and technological upgrades
- Increased employment and employment effectiveness opportunities - inducing new employee hires as a result of tech instruction

Conclusion

As part of a Digital Inclusion and **Regional Workforce Plan**, a strong Employers Initiative Program can work hand in hand to align resources, focus on small business capacity and job growth and most importantly invest in giving people the tools and skills they need to succeed in an increasingly digital

economy. **Any or all of these plans can be developed into fundable projects and Axiom and the Axiom Education & Training Center stand ready to work with you to bring these programs to life.**

Appendix A:

Surveys, Interviews and Meeting Results

Axiom and Maine West interviewed businesses, community and municipal leaders, as well as residents in the Maine West region to discuss Computer Skills/Digital Literacy Training and Workforce Skills Training.

Business

For the business community, an online survey was distributed, followed by interviews. Key businesses were identified to target during this process. In addition to the survey being available to all businesses in each community, Axiom and Maine West contacted 57 businesses via email or phone calls, and Maine West sent the business survey link to the communities and multiple listservs. A total of 71 businesses responded to the survey and/or interviews. (See Addendum 1 – Business & Workforce Needs Survey Results)

Residential

As with businesses, community & municipal leaders and the residential community were invited to participate in a Community Broadband Survey by Maine West. It was the goal of the survey for these community and municipal leaders to understand what citizens of the region were voicing as their issues and concerns around better broadband connectivity. A total of 396 residents completed the survey. (See Addendum 2 - Community Internet Survey Results)

Community & Municipal

Increasingly rural communities are unable or unaware of how to take advantage of the economic and educational opportunities that a robust broadband connection can help provide. A series of meetings occurred to discuss the importance and understanding of broadband capabilities and how individual residents might take advantage of these types of connections. Demonstrating distance learning education, telehealth, telecommuting, cloud-based services and software begins the process of developing a Digital Literacy Plan for the region.

Through the interview and survey process, Axiom identified five key focal points for Maine West communities.

Key Components:

Aging in Place

The Maine West region, with a population of 37,542 residents, and per the statistics for Oxford County, the median age is 44.6 years old; 40.9% of the population is over 50 years old; 17% of the County's population is over 65 years old, per the 2010 American Census Survey.

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

Maine West and the communities should consider exploring technology tools and offering classes and workshops that will assist their residents to remain in their homes as they become older. Current

technology programs available are medication reminders; pill dispensers; health management (monitor blood pressure, pulse, heartbeat, blood glucose levels); nutrition guides; fitness tools; and brain games. Also available are home monitoring systems; personal emergency response systems; and GPS tracking systems.

A study was completed by the Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine, and presented at the Blaine House Conference on Aging in September 2006. The report, “Maine’s Aging Economy and the Economy of Aging”

<http://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/data/issuebriefdemographics.pdf> stated, “*that within Maine, the growth in Maine’s elderly population will not occur evenly, with the result that some parts of Maine will be distinctly older than others*”. Those areas with a disproportionate elder population should be addressing the specific needs of this particular population.

Axiom Education & Training Center’s “National Digital Equity Center” (NDEC) can provide training to Maine West’s senior population and to family members to leverage available technologies. NDEC can provide the communities with trained educators to teach seniors, caregiver alliances or remote classes for family caregivers. The senior citizen and the family member can learn firsthand how to use the online monitoring systems or even use something as basic as an iPad for communicating and visual check-ins. Patients can connect to providers for care and support via videoconference (telehealth), as well as including family members to actively participate in the care of a loved one.

Collaborating partners to consider are:

- Southern Maine Agency on Aging <http://www.smaaa.org>
- Seniors Plus <http://www.seniorsplus.org>
- Healthy Oxford Hills <https://healthyoxfordhills.org/resource-categories/elderly>
- Western Maine Health, Norway <https://mainehealth.org/western-maine-health/services>
- Rumford Hospital, Rumford <http://www.rumfordhospital.org>
- Androscoggin Home Care & Hospice <https://www.ahch.org/About-AHCH>
- Bethel Age-Friendly Community Initiative <http://agefriendly.community/community/bethel-region-age-friendly-community-initiative/>

Tourism

The beautiful, rural, Maine West region offers a myriad of landscapes and activities. Beautiful rivers, ponds, and lakes beckon anglers, paddlers, bikers, and swimmers throughout the summer, and then freeze over for ice fishers, hunters, snowmobilers, cross-country skiing, Alpine skiing, dogsledding, and ice skaters in the winter. Visitors can enjoy four seasons of activities –geocaching, ATV’s, floatplanes, whitewater rafting, hiking, camping, birding, and generally enjoying the great Maine woods and waters.

There are many tourism related businesses - lodging, restaurants, guided tours, the arts, as well as locally Maine-made products. Maine West communities should consider exploring technology tools by offering classes and workshops that will assist businesses and residents in promoting tourism.

Axiom Education & Training Center’s “National Digital Equity Center” (NDEC) can work with local organizations to train Maine West communities businesses and interested community members to leverage available technologies that increase and promote the Maine West region’s tourism industry. NDEC can provide the community with trained educators. Businesses and community members can learn firsthand how to create and update websites, leverage the power of social media, as well as utilize apps for walking tours and points of interest.

Collaborating partners to consider are:

- Oxford Hills County Chamber of Commerce <http://www.oxfordhillsmaine.com>
- Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce <http://www.bethelmaine.com>
- River Valley Chamber of Commerce <http://rivervalleychamber.com/>
- Northern Forest Center <https://northernforest.org>
- Maine Woods Consortium <http://www.mainewoodsconsortium.org/mwtti/welcome-me>
- Maine Office of Tourism <https://visitmaine.com>
- Maine Tourism Association <https://www.mainetourism.com/>
- Maine’s Lakes and Mountains Tourism Council <https://mainelakesandmountains.com>

Business Growth and Support

Currently, there are 5,295 businesses included in the 2010 American Census Survey in Oxford County, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml. We suspect that there are many more unreported businesses in the region, including home-based and/or cottage-industry businesses. Although undocumented, it is estimated that 70-74% of businesses in the Maine West region are micro-businesses - sole-entrepreneurs and less than three employees, per the Maine Department of Labor’s Center for Workforce Research & Information. <http://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/qcew.html>.

Of the businesses that responded to the Business Survey:

- **56% of businesses expect training will be needed** for new and existing staff over the next year
- 54% of businesses report that they currently offer training programs to their staff
- **47% state they are interested in offering computer skills classes** to their employees
- 6% of businesses do not have a website; 76% do not use a domain email address
- 22% of businesses would like to offer customer service training, 22% are interested in marketing workshops.

The Maine West Community Survey reports that 29% of residents use the internet for both home and business, and 37% report that someone in the household works from home.

Axiom Education & Training Center’s “National Digital Equity Center” (NDEC) can organize training for Maine West’s business community to leverage available technologies and industry specific instruction. NDEC can provide the community with educators to hold classes, as well as collaborate with local organizations to provide training. The business and community members can learn firsthand how to create and update websites, increase technical proficiency and industry specific knowledge.

Collaborating partners to consider are:

- Oxford Hills County Chamber of Commerce <http://www.oxfordhillsmaine.com>
- Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce <http://www.bethelmaine.com>
- River Valley Chamber of Commerce <http://rivervalleychamber.com/>
- Community Concepts Finance Corporation <http://www.ccfcmaine.org/>
- Maine Small Business Development Centers www.mainesbdc.org
- Maine Woods Consortium which offers WelcomeME (Customer Service Training) www.welcomemetraining.com
- Central Maine Community College/Workforce and Professional Development <http://www.cmcc.edu/ccs/Home.aspx#.UXWbFqK7KAg>
- Oxford Hills SCORE (serves the Maine West region) <https://oxfordhills.score.org/>
- Region 9 Adult & Community Education <http://region9.maineadulted.org>
- MSAD/SAD #44 Adult & Community Education <http://sad44.maineadulted.org>
- Oxford Hills/Nezinscot Adult & Community Education <http://sad17.maineadulted.org>
- University College <https://learn.maine.edu/Rumford> & <https://learn.maine.edu/southparis>
- EnvisionRumford (Rumford's downtown organization) <http://www.envisionrumford.org/>
- Norway Downtown <http://www.norwaydowntown.org/>

Websites, Social Media and Domain Email

Within the region's communities, 18% of businesses report that they do not have a website, 55% report that they would like to learn social media skills for their business, and 70% state that they do not use a business domain for email addresses.

In addition to providing training to businesses, and coordinating with organizations in the Maine West region, Axiom Education & Training Center's "National Digital Equity Center" (NDEC) can provide a train-the-trainer program for Maine West and the communities' businesses.

Appendix B:

Workforce Development Skills Analysis

The Business Surveys included questions pertaining to workforce development skills and needs. Following is an overview of the results.

Business Survey Results

- **47% see a need for computer skills training for their employees**
- 36% see a need in training for specific software
- 13% of businesses report computer skills are “average”; 45% are “good”; 40% are “excellent”. Only 2% rate their computer skills as “poor”
- 34% of employees’ computer skills are “average”; 46% are “good”; 13% are excellent. Only 7% rate their employees’ skills as “poor” or “other”
- 75% of employees learn best “hands-on”, followed by 47% learn best by one-on-one instruction
- 71% prefer on-site instruction
- Businesses are interested in offering the following computer skills (digital literacy classes):
 - Introduction to Computers
 - Windows 7,8,10
 - Microsoft Programs including: Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, Publisher, Office 360
 - QuickBooks
 - PhotoShop
 - Social Media including: FaceBook, Twitter, Skype, Instagram for Business & Personal
 - Internet Security
 - Video-Streaming
 - iPad
 - Google Docs, etc.
 - WordPress
- Other classes:
 - Selling/Purchasing items online

- **13% are sole entrepreneurs; 33% have 2-5 employees; 13% have 5-10 employees; 9% 10-25 employees; 31% over 25 employees**
- **Businesses requiring different skill levels include:**
 - 33% Unskilled labor
 - 73% Skilled labor
 - 63% High School Diploma
 - 53% 2-year Associate Degree
 - 59% 4-year Bachelors' Degree
 - 27% Master Degree
 - 45% Special Licenses or Certification
- **56% expect training will be needed for new and existing employees over the next year.**
- **Businesses have difficulty recruiting new employees stating the following reasons:**
 - 48% Labor shortage supply
 - 31% Skills not adequate
 - 3% Compensation benefits
 - 17% Other
- **The following training/workshops would be beneficial:**
 - 28% Marketing
 - 22% Customer Service
 - 17% OSHA Training: Safety Works
 - 33% Other (ServSafe, SEO, CNC)
- **37% will be implementing new software programs in the next year**
- **54% currently offer training programs to their staff including:**
 - Safety/OSHA Training
 - Fred Pryor Online Training
 - Job Specific Training
 - Website Construction Training
 - Social Media Training
 - Seminars (Professional Development)
 - Industry Specific/Certification

The results of the business survey in each community point to the need for an employer initiated workforce development program targeted at small businesses throughout the region. Pooling resources and working together, Maine West should strongly consider focusing local and regional resources on employee training that enhances their skills and viability in the marketplace, while also adding value in their current employment situation.

Takeaway #1: Employers are interested in training assistance based on the number of respondents to the surveys

Takeaway #2: Employee training is needed to help employers become more proficient or efficient in the workplace

Takeaway #3: A strong workforce development-training program will begin to alleviate the difficulty in recruiting new talent as existing resources are pooled and directed to assist both employers and employees get the skills they need

Appendix C:

Grant Funding Resources

State Grant Funding Resources

The **ConnectME Authority** offers two types of grants - Infrastructure and Community Broadband Planning Grants. For the purposes of this report, the planning grant is not a consideration. We would recommend looking toward Infrastructure grants, details can be found here:

<http://maine.gov/connectme/grants/>

Axiom has extensive knowledge of these grants, and has received over \$1 million in funding.

- Grant proposals must meet the new minimum state standard of 25Mbps/3Mbps
- Grant limits are suggested, but typically \$100,000, which must be matched 1 to 1 with a combination of cash and in-kind services
- Area targeted must be unserved or severely underserved (service that is less than 25Mbps download)

Typically, ConnectME grants open for applications in the March- April timeframe.

The **Maine Community Foundation** has regional grants that can support initiatives up to \$10,000.

<http://www.mainecef.org/GrantsNonprofits/AvailableGrantsDeadlines/CommunityBuildingGrantProgram.aspx>

- Grants available up to \$10,000
- Local decision makers by county
- Various criteria that needs review
- Deadline February 15th of each new year

Northern Border Regional Commission Grants, <http://www.nbrc.gov>. The Commission accepts grant applications from across the northern border regions of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York.

- Requires at least a 1 to 1 cash match
- Must be tied to quantifiable job creation
- Very competitive

Contact: Andrea Smith at (207) 624-9813 or andrea.smith@maine.gov for information on deadlines and program parameters.

Federal Grant Funding Resources

U.S. Department of Commerce- **Economic Development Administration (EDA)** provides funding for economic development projects across the state of Maine. Maine projects are reviewed and administered by EDA's local representative, Alan Brigham at (215) 316-2965 or abrigham@eda.gov. Programs and eligibility can be found at www.eda.gov

- Various funding programs
- Guidelines encourage regions to incorporate broadband investments in their regional strategies (CEDs)
- Funding requires match

U.S. Department of Commerce – **Broadband USA** is helping communities nationwide ensure they have the broadband infrastructure, digitally literate workforce and engaged citizens to thrive in the Digital Economy. Details can be found here: <https://www2.ntia.doc.gov/>

- Provides direct (one-to-one) assistance to communities
- Resource rich website-no direct grants
- Building a self-assessment tool for communities

U.S. Department of Agriculture-**Rural Development** has a number of grant programs worth investigating. Local office in Bangor, contact Timothy Hobbs, State Director, (207) 990-9160. More information on programs in Maine can be found here: www.rd.usda/me

- Rural Broadband Access Loans and Loan Guarantees Program
 - 2018 Program has not been announced
- **Several other competitive grant programs to explore eligibility and criteria?? What are they??**

U.S. Department of Treasury- **New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC)** has recently clarified that broadband infrastructure and related activities are eligible for NMTC provided they meet certain criteria located here:

<https://www.cdfifund.gov/Documents/2015%20NMTC%20Application%20QA%20FINAL.pdf>

- Axiom is exploring the potential of NMTC funding
- Eligible census tracts are being reviewed
- It's unclear without investigation if Maine West and/or the communities may be eligible

Broadband Opportunity Council Funding Report- **U.S. Dept. of Commerce and USDA** released a report in January 2017 listing all federal broadband funding resources - See Addendum 3.